

This week's community profile: Little Sturgeon

# It's 'God's country' on the bay

By Karil Van Boxel

Press-Gazette

LITTLE STURGEON — Door County's first settlement remains its best-kept secret.

Once considered the hub of Door County, Little Sturgeon still would be if the Sturgeon Bay ship canal had not been built, residents say.

Lumber and lime were shipped from the busy port and large sailing vessels were built here. Family farms dotted the landscape.

Most commercial fishing boats are gone, but one still docks at Little Sturgeon Inn Resort, owned by Bob and Linda Danek, 3596 County CC.

"Fishing always was here from the very beginning," Bob Danek, 51, says. "This (area) is every man's dream. It's a paradise for kids."

"I don't think I'd ever go back to the city," says Linda, 41.

Press-Gazette photos  
by Joan Gutheridge

The ice of Little Sturgeon Bay behind their marina is dotted with shanties, evidence that perch fishing is alive and well.

Phyllis Rozmarynoski, 67, 8921 Polish Lane, can snowmobile the 2½ miles to good fishing holes.

She and her husband retired here six years ago from Two Rivers after owning a cottage on the bay for 29 years.

"It's peaceful and there's clean air," she says. "And the people are friendly."

Roger Cherney is another former cottage dweller who now calls Little Sturgeon home.

"Little Sturgeon's now on the map. Someday I hope to have a ZIP Code here," he says.

Cherney left Green Bay seeking a site to build a mini-mart. He found it at Stevenson Pier, 8654 County C.

He owns Little Sturgeon's only store and gas station and turned an old schoolhouse into a restaurant that is open from April through December.

"The summertime accounts for 50 percent of our business," says Cherney, 43. "But we need both locals and cottage people."

Residents often travel the nine miles to Sturgeon Bay to work and shop. Green Bay is 40 miles to the southwest.

Lifelong residents such as Ray Weldon Jr., 59, 3540 County CC and Allen "Rusty" Claflin, 67, 8815 Claflin Park Road, are descendents of early settlers.

Weldon's family has owned property here since 1835.

Claflin is a descendant of Door County pioneer Increase Claflin, whose wife is buried in the local cemetery.

A former commercial fisherman, Rusty Claflin now watches the bay from his living room window as he waits for an injured foot to heal.

"There aren't too many people here. No crowds," he says. "The people here all help each other out."

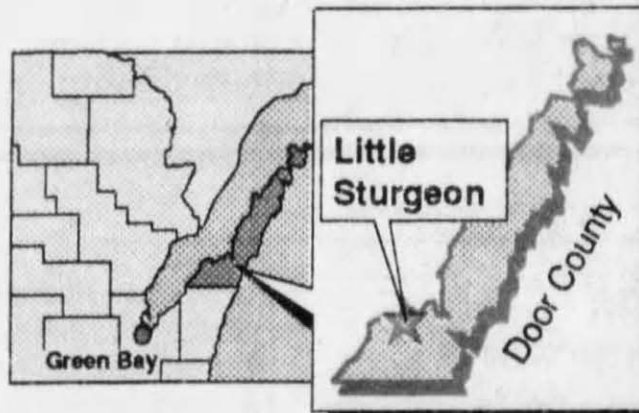
"This is God's country," said Roger Frisque, 62, a former De Pere resident who lives at 3542 County CC.

"Fishing in the summertime, fishing in the wintertime and out the back door to hunt."



**Tasty catch:** Roger Frisque, 62, of Little Sturgeon peeks out of a cozy ice shanty on Little Sturgeon

Bay to show off one of the perch he caught during a recent day of fishing on the bay.



## The Little Sturgeon file

- **Population:** About 350 year-round and 800 to 1,000 in summer.
- **Location:** Settlers were here by 1835, but Little Sturgeon was not on the map until a couple of years ago.
- **Yesterday:** Reminders of the past can be seen in pilings from the old dock near Gustafson's Point, and a sprawling offshore rooming house for fishermen. A park at the end of Claflin Park Road marks where area pioneer Increase Claflin landed.

Dorothy and Fred Malvitz bought their bar at County C and Stevenson Pier Road during the Depression and operated it for more than 55 years.

The couple, now 78 and 86, respectively, met at the tavern when he was tending bar. They will celebrate their 64th anniversary in August.

Last year, the Malvitzes' son, a retired farmer, kept the tavern open.

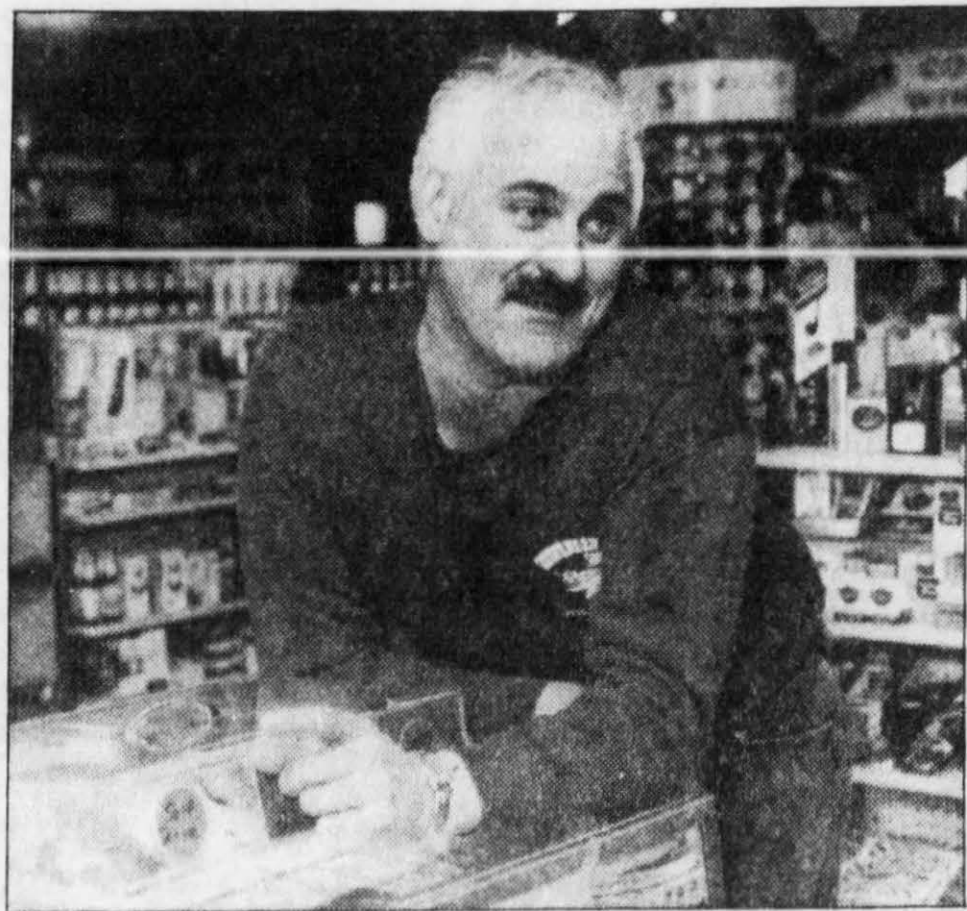
"We had a big ice house here and that ice would keep all summer," she says of the early days. "Neighbors would bring

their horses and sleighs to haul the ice from the bay and we'd feed them."

Vernon Destree, 70, 8819 County CC, says Little Sturgeon was all farm country when he was growing up, not a resort community like it is today.

"We had some grand times down there skating on the ice," recalls wife, Betty, 65, who grew up nearby. "The bigger boys would shovel pathways and make a big bonfire at night. It was a lot of fun."

■ **Next week:** Wayside in Brown County



**Only store:** Roger Cherney, who came to Little Sturgeon from Green Bay, talks about the community and business at his Stevenson Pier mini-mart.



**Bay watch:** Fern and Allen "Rusty" Claflin watch ice fishermen on Little Sturgeon Bay through their living room window.